

smooth Eighties synth pop band such as Talk Talk.

Frontman Casper Clausen, with his preppy Matt Smith suit and bow tie combo, was an unfailing polite presence with just a hint of relaxed pop star cool. In addition to the contributions of his regular comrades, the equally clean-cut Mads Christian Brauer and Rasmus Stolberg, their sound was enhanced, even characterised at points by soprano siren Katinka Fogh Vindelev, doing a grand job of deputising for the 70-piece girls' choir who appear on the album.

While their show was pretty uneventful, the band were so gracious, laid back and informal that it was an easy job warming to their particular stage presence, which almost compensated for the lack of sonic action. And when they formed a little Scandinavian junkyard orchestra for an encore piece featuring unamplified, a capella harmony vocals and random percussion, it was even possible to go home satisfied by the experience.

FIONA SHEPHERD

MUSIC
SCO BRITTEN 100
CHAMBER CONCERT
QUEEN'S HALL, EDINBURGH
★★★★

IT WAS a dark, melancholy programme for a sunny spring afternoon – from Schubert's sombre *Auf dem Strom*, written in the last year of his short life, to Britten's bleak, war-themed canticle *Still Falls the Rain*.

So it was to the enormous

credit of the trio of musicians – the SCO's principal horn, Alec Frank-Gemmill, pianist Tom Poster and respected tenor John Mark Ainsley – that their performances were so magnificently life-affirming, glowing with vivid colours and alive with crackling energy.

It was also a chance for the three men to shine as individuals. Frank-Gemmill showed off his effortlessly noble tone right from the start of *Auf dem Strom*, and gave a wonderfully characterful account of Schumann's Adagio and Allegro, with phrasing and tonal control so evocative that it made you sit up and take note. In German composer Volker David Kirchner's recent *Lamento d'Orfeo*, Frank-Gemmill was required to play into the undamped piano strings, creating a halo of resonance – and he rose to the piece's theatrical demands with a convincing sense of drama.

Poster was the only performer on stage throughout, and his two solo Schubert impromptus sang with a ringing clarity.

Ainsley refused to bow to *Auf dem Strom*'s death-obsessed mood, giving instead a reading that was airy and somewhat wide-eyed – and all the more poignant for that. But it was his scorching, unforgiving performance of Britten's *Still Falls the Rain*, breathtakingly intense, that made the concert's high point – although he dismissed the audience on a lighter note with a sparkling quintet of Britten's witty folksong settings.

DAVID KETTLE